

Travel safety

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Ouch! That was painful. Extremely. Even though the rumors of my demise were once again greatly exaggerated, I know better than to seek any sympathy from you hard core Horn of Africa dwellers. I will tell you that it felt like I had died and turned south at the Pearly Gates spending several days squarely in airline hell. It got so bad at one point that I actually punted, rented a car and drove from Atlanta to New Orleans in the middle of the night. We won't Operational Risk Management that one.

There will be a little revenge when some poor unsuspecting African baggage handler opens my presently lost cooler and discovers what \$300 worth of rotten Ballyhoo smells like.

Since this is supposed to be a safety article, let's talk a little bit about travel safety. I just returned from two weeks of enjoying the freedom that we are all fighting for and have to tell you that the present transportation situation we are faced with in the post-rotator era is a genuine nightmare. While leadership works this problem out, we owe it to ourselves and our troops to acknowledge the challenges we face and do all we can to be prepared to handle it.

I happened to have a commercial itinerary, which seems like a best-case do-able situation and which proved to be much less than that. I literally missed every connection and all my checked bags were lost, both directions.

Here are a few pointers to keep in mind and to pass on to your people prior to heading for the States, whether for rest and recuperation or redeployment.

Money. Take more than you think you will need. 5000 Djiboutian Francs are required just to board the plane here at Ambouli and they do not take U.S. Dollars or any Credit Cards. There is also a boarding tax in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, and I am sure in many other locations. Food, drink and transportation are all very expensive during the transit. Hang on to some of your combat pay to use on the way home.

Sobriety. You will need your wits about you and more. Being hungover or intoxicated will not be your friend when you confront someone in a foreign country. Don't raise your voice and do not threaten him even though he more than likely deserves it.

Hydration. Three days in a pressurized aircraft cabin will dry you out, even if you do avoid caffeine and alcohol. The best thing to do may be to carry extra water with you and drink it often. You will arrive feeling much better if you do.

Planning. Know your itinerary and monitor your progress. Time zone awareness is critical to making your connections and knowing when you are about to miss one. There is no reason to start doing the OJ through Charles DeGaulle International if it is already an hour past takeoff time. Trust me on this one.

Flexibility. Just because it says Air France on the ticket does not mean that is what will be painted on the airplane. Hard to believe, but true. Do not have your Mom or Wife standing by with "Hug Me" signs and dirty diapers in Peoria while you are watching the Standby list with your name at the bottom in Atlanta. Pack a carry-on bag that you can live on for several days. It will slow you down while sprinting through the terminal, but will ultimately prove invaluable.

Communications. Buy a calling card before you depart, but be prepared to have a hard time getting a domestic connection. I would try and not have any business that had to be taken care of for three or four days around your travel dates.

Attention to detail. Keeping track of your passport, tickets, boarding passes, baggage claim checks and receipts will go a long way toward determining whether or not you survive your own personal travel ordeal. Lots of people will handle your military ID and other documentation and it is your responsibility to make sure that you retain all of it. Fail here and you may very well be stranded with no way to even ask for help.

Patience. Losing your cool will not help the situation and if someone does not understand your version of English, louder will not make it any clearer. It could easily make things worse. Speak slowly, like on the Voice of America "Stupid English" radio show. That does work, maybe. We are not popular everywhere and local cops can be highly unforgiving.

More money. Have several credit cards, with credit this time, ready to go. I had a debit card get turned down several times, even though it was perfectly valid. Extra money in the various national currencies where you will be stopping can mean the difference between success and failure. And if you do find yourself having to deal with a policeman it can be critical. Do not count on having an ATM when you need one. It will not be there, or if it is, it will not work.

Bottom line? Rest and recuperation leave is a well deserved and important benefit of serving here in the Horn of Africa. Just take yours with a grain of salt. There is a real opportunity for disaster on these trips and how well prepared you are before stepping foot on the first airplane will go a long way toward determining how much you actually enjoy your leave. Travel Safely.

Enduring Freedom Chapel

Weekly Worship Schedule

Sunday:

8 -8:50 a.m.	Catholic confessions are heard*
9 a.m.	Catholic Mass
10:30 a.m.	Protestant Worship Service
2:30 p.m.	Latter Day Saints Service
8 p.m.	Praise & Worship Service

Monday:

Noon	Catholic Mass
6:30 p.m.	Praise and Worship Rehearsal
7:30 p.m.	Bible study

Tuesday:

Noon	Catholic Mass
6:15 p.m.	Catholic Choir Rehearsal
7:30 p.m.	Bible Study

Wednesday:

6:30 a.m.	Catholic Mass
6 p.m.	Bible Study
7:30 p.m.	Breaking Free , Women's study

Thursday:

Noon	Catholic Mass
6:30 p.m.	Praise and Worship Rehearsal
8 p.m.	Alcoholics Anonymous

Friday:

Noon	Catholic Mass
6:15 p.m.	Catholic Worship Rehearsal
7:30 p.m.	Enduring Freedom Bible Fellowship

Saturday:

5:45-6:10 p.m.	Catholic confessions are heard*
6:15 p.m.	Catholic Mass (Fulfills Sun. obligation)
7:30 p.m.	Fellowship at MWR tent

* Catholic confessions are offered at other times by appointments by calling 824-4925 or (cell) 828-736. Catholic confessions are heard behind the screen and face to face and will take place in the Blessed Sacrament Room located in the rear of the chapel.

Christmas Caroling

In the spirit of the season, there will be Christmas caroling throughout the camp on Christmas Eve. The singing will start at 8:30 p.m. at the chapel. In addition, there is caroling practice every Thursday at 6:30 p.m. and Saturday at 7:30 p.m. until the event takes place. Anyone interested in offering their voice should contact Chaplain Hannigan at 824-4925.